

Ruling maintains ban on Russian track and field athletes from Rio Olympics

George Gallanis
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The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) announced Wednesday it was upholding a ban issued last November and confirmed last month by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) on participation by the Russian track and field team in next month's Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. The CAS, which is considered the final adjudicator for international sport disputes, denied an appeal filed by the Russian Olympic Committee and 68 Russian athletes.

The IAAF decided to suspend the All Russian Athletics Federation from membership in the world track and field organization after reports were published charging the Russian government and sports authorities with overseeing the doping of Russian athletes with performance enhancing drugs at past Olympic events and other international competitions.

Some of the banned Russian athletes may be eligible to compete as "neutral athletes" in the summer games, although the CAS has insisted that it has no say in the matter, which must be decided by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The groundwork for the CAS decision to uphold the ban on Russian track and field athletes was laid by the call issued Monday by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) for all Russian athletes, not just track and field competitors, to be banned from the Rio Olympics. WADA alleged in its statement that the Russian government, including President Vladimir Putin himself, played a principal role in coordinating and administering illegal performance-enhancing drugs to large numbers of Russian athletes. It called for all Russian government officials to "be denied access to international competitions, including Rio 2016."

WADA also urged the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the governing body of

international soccer, to launch an investigation into possible doping by Russian soccer players. This would place at risk Russia's hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2018.

On Tuesday, the International Olympic Committee held an emergency meeting but put off a final decision on whether to impose a blanket ban on the Russian team. The IOC is set to meet Sunday to discuss what punishment the Russian Olympic team will receive. There is no precedent in Olympics history for the banning of an entire national team.

Commenting on the matter, IOC President Thomas Bach said: "The findings of the report show a shocking and unprecedented attack on the integrity of sports and on the Olympic Games. Therefore, the IOC will not hesitate to take the toughest sanctions available against any individual or organisation implicated."

The WADA report, authored by Richard McLaren, was based on a series of documentaries broadcast last year by the German public television channel ARD and claims made by Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov published by the *New York Times* last May. Rodchenkov, who was in charge of a WADA-accredited laboratory in Moscow, said he personally oversaw many of the doping procedures, particularly those that took place at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

It is entirely possible that the Russian team engaged in some form of doping with the involvement of the state. Olympic medals are valuable currency in the promotion of Russian nationalism, a key ideological prop of the Putin regime.

That being said, there is no question that the singling out of Russia on doping charges is politically motivated. It is being driven by the United States as part of Washington's economic and military offensive to isolate, destabilize and ultimately dismember the

Russian Federation. That, in turn, is seen as essential to realizing the overriding goal of establishing US imperialist hegemony over the entire Eurasian continent.

The claim that Russia is some kind of outlier and affront to the “Olympic spirit” is a cynical fraud. The Olympics have long exemplified the money-grubbing corruption and national chauvinist politics of the professional sports industry. Doping is rampant and practiced by virtually every country.

Since 1986, when the International Olympic Committee changed the rules to allow professional athletes to compete in every phase of Olympics competition, any lingering connection to the principle of amateur sports has been severed. The Olympics have become a crass spectacle of corporate commercialism and flag-waving patriotism. In the process, the pressure on athletes to win at any cost—and the monetary reward for gaining a gold medal—have grown immensely.

Bribery scandals have become routine. One of the worst was the payoff by US officials and boosters to members of the International Olympic Committee for voting to locate the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. An ensuing investigation found the IOC members accepted bribes as well during the bidding for the 1998 Winter Olympics and 2000 Summer Games.

As for doping, there is nothing that compares to the decade-long fraud carried out by Lance Armstrong, who rode for the team of the US Postal Service, a government-sponsored corporation. In October 2012, the US Anti-Doping Agency released a report declaring that the US Postal Service cycling team had run “the most sophisticated, professional and successful doping program the sport has ever seen.”



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